

PROTECTED LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT

LANDMARK NAME: M.D. Anderson-Magnolia Park YWCA
(former)

AGENDA ITEM: A

OWNERS: 7305 Navigation LLC

HPO FILE No.: 18PL164

APPLICANTS: Preservation Houston

DATE ACCEPTED: AUG-13-2018

LOCATION: 7305 Navigation Blvd., Houston, Texas 77011

HAHC HEARING: AUG-22-2018

SITE INFORMATION: Lots 35 thru 45 and Tracts 4 thru 16, Block 118, Magnolia Park Section 2, Houston, Harris County. Building area 28,000 SF, Land area 58,153 SF

TYPE OF APPROVAL REQUESTED: Protected Landmark Designation

Meets Criteria 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 8 for Landmark Designation and Criteria 1 for Protected Landmark Designation

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE SUMMARY

The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Houston was established as the local branch of the national YWCA organization to provide educational, recreational and social service programs for women, girls and their families. The YWCA branch at 7305 Navigation Boulevard served the Magnolia Park neighborhood, one of the oldest Hispanic communities in Houston. The building was constructed with funding from the M.D. Anderson Foundation and the YWCA Expansion Fund. The facility was completed in 1962 and dedicated on January 20, 1963. The building's exterior and interior have remained largely unchanged in the time since the dedication.

The M.D. Anderson-Magnolia Park YWCA branch was a hub of neighborhood activity through almost 40 years of operation. In addition to producing programs and activities, the YWCA served as Magnolia Park's polling place during elections, as a meeting location for community groups and as a much-needed recreational facility for the neighborhood.

The YWCA ended its last program in Magnolia Park around 1999 and the property then sat vacant for more than a decade. The current owner purchased the building in late 2014 to prevent its demolition and began sensitive renovations. The owner is committed to maintaining the facility as a gathering place for Magnolia Park residents and has reopened the former YWCA for community events and activities. After flooding associated with Hurricane Harvey damaged the Wortham Theater Center in 2017, the owner provided the former YWCA as the rehearsal site for Houston Grand Opera.

In 1970, the M.D. Anderson-Magnolia Park YWCA, served as one of nine locations that hosted Huelga "Boycott" Enrichment Centers, which allowed the Mexican-American community to protest against Houston ISD while still being able to educate their students.

Magnolia Park YWCA also hosted the 1971 National Chicana Conference. The event was the first interstate assembly of Mexican-American feminists organized in the United States. An estimated 600 women from 23 states attended from May 28-30 to discuss issues of gender discrimination, inadequate educational opportunities, racism and employment discrimination.

The M.D. Anderson-Magnolia Park Branch YWCA is one of several notable mid-twentieth-century modern style buildings designed by award-winning architect Thomas Edmund Greacen. Greacen collaborated with architect Richard Stanton Evans on the YWCA building, which reflects the influence of the International Style.

T.D. Howe Construction Company was the contractor for the YWCA building. The one-story building contains three major areas with different functions: classroom/office, auditorium/gallery and gymnasium. The three areas are arranged around a central courtyard. The functional areas are separated by breezeways. The building has remained largely unchanged since its dedication in 1963.

HISTORY AND SIGNIFICANCE

ARCHITECTURAL STYLE

The M.D. Anderson-Magnolia Park YWCA was designed and built in the mid-twentieth-century modern style and reflects the influence of the International Style of architecture. As he did at First Unitarian/Universalist Church of Houston (1952) and Sylvan Beach Pavilion (1956), architect Thomas Greacen combined common elements of both styles in the design.

Identifying features of mid-twentieth-century modern commercial and institutional buildings include a low-pitched or flat roof with widely overhanging eaves and plate-glass windows that extend to the roofline. These buildings are often constructed with wood, stone, brick or concrete block. The front façade typically includes broad expanses of uninterrupted wall surfaces and recessed or obscured entry doors. Facades are commonly asymmetrical. Courtyards are used to bring the outdoors inside.

There is some overlap between mid-twentieth-century modern and International Style architecture. Both styles are characterized by clean lines and minimal adornment. Identifying features of the International Style include a

flat roof, usually without coping at the roofline, windows flush with outer walls and smooth unornamented surfaces with no decorative detailing at doors or windows. The façade composition commonly includes linear window groupings, expanses of windowless wall surface and uniform white stucco wall cladding. Façades are commonly asymmetrical.

MAGNOLIA PARK NEIGHBORHOOD

Magnolia Park, one of Houston's oldest Hispanic neighborhoods, is located adjacent to the Houston Ship Channel in eastern Harris County. It was platted in 1890 on a 1,374-acre site that had been part of Brady Place, the homestead of Houston promoter John Thomas Brady. The area stretched from Harrisburg Road across Bray's Bayou seven miles downstream from Houston. Magnolia Park was named for the 3,750 magnolia trees that developers planted there. The community became an independent municipality in 1909 and was incorporated as the City of Magnolia Park in 1913. It was annexed by the City of Houston in 1926.

In the early 1900s, Mexican-Americans from South Texas began to settle in large numbers in Houston in barrios in Houston's North Side and East End, especially in Magnolia Park. These neighborhoods became the industrial workshops of early 20th century Houston. During the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920), Mexicans fleeing the turmoil in their native country emigrated to Houston in increasing numbers, boosting the Mexican population of Magnolia Park. Most of the new residents worked as laborers, laying

railroad tracks or dredging and widening Buffalo Bayou. Others loaded cotton on ships and railcars or helped construct the Houston Ship Channel. Many Mexican-American women worked in Houston's jute millsⁱ. Mexican immigrants purchased lots, built homes and fostered Mexican cultural life through clubs, fraternal organizations and community events. Two early Magnolia Park churches became central to neighborhood life: Our Lady of Guadalupe Church, organized in 1912, and Heart of Mary Catholic Church, established in 1926. Our Lady of Guadalupe provided schooling, and together the two churches formed a community center.

By 1920, neighborhood residents had developed their own commercial district of Mexican-owned businesses.

A school named for Lorenzo de Zavala, a prominent politician who fought for Texas independence, was established in 1920 and a Mexican chamber of commerce promoted the community's interests. Sports associations sponsored by local businesses flourished, as did social clubs like the Club Cultural Recreativo Mexico Bello, founded in 1924.

By 1929, Magnolia Park was home to the largest Mexican community in Houston, and Anglo Houstonians referred to the area as "Little Mexico." Escuela Mexicana Hidalgo, a private school organized to preserve Mexican culture, was established in 1930. By the mid-1930s, political organizations developed; groups like Club Femenino-Chapultepec, the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and Ladies LULAC provided recreational opportunities, promoted Latin culture and protested segregation in Houston. By the early 1940s, the area from the Second Ward — often called "Segundo Barrio" as a reference to its Hispanic population — to Magnolia Park was referred to as the East End. The area saw a significant population increase during World War II as Mexican-Americans moved to Houston for war-related jobs. Residents of the neighborhood were largely working class, employed by the industrial plants, refineries and port facilities that surrounded Magnolia Park. By 1990, the neighborhood's population had grown to 14,000 residents. Magnolia Park celebrated its centennial in 2009.

HUELGA ENRICHMENT CENTERS

On May 30, 1970, federal district judge Ben Connally ordered Houston Independent School District to implement an integration plan that called for shifting school attendance zones to facilitate integration in response to the case *Ross v. Eckels*. One month later, in *Cisneros v. Corpus Christi Independent School District*, Judge Woodrow Seals found that Mexican-Americans were a distinct ethnic group for desegregation purposes.

When the Houston Board of Education moved forward on integrating schools in the autumn of 1970, predominantly Mexican-American schools were classified as "white and paired with African-American schools for integration while leaving schools with Anglo-American student bodies segregated. In response, the Mexican American Education Council organized a boycott of the public schools and established nine Huelga Enrichment Centers. (*Huelga* is Spanish for "strike" or "boycott.") These locations, which included the Magnolia Park YWCA, were commonly called "huelga schools" and continued educating Mexican-American children during the three-week boycott. In the end, Houston ISD recognized Mexican-Americans as a distinct ethnic group and promoted education reforms.

NATIONAL CHICANA CONFERENCE/CONFERENCIA DE MUJERES POR LA RAZA

The National Chicana Conference was the first interstate assembly of Mexican-American feminists organized in the United States. The event was held at the Magnolia Park YWCA from May 28-30, 1971. Houston broadcaster Elma Barrera helped organized the event, which was attended by an estimated 600 women from 23 states. The participants included students, social workers and other progressives who had differing views from the women who had assembled two years earlier at a Denver, Colorado, youth conference and declared that Chicanas did not want to be liberated. The Houston group was linked to more moderate Hispanic women's organizations such as Cruz Azul Mexicana, Ladies LULAC, the Mexican American Youth Organization and the newly formed Raza Unida Party.

The conference focused on issues that were at the forefront of the nascent Mexican-American civil rights movement. Speakers urged participants to work together to help end gender and employment discrimination, racism and inadequate educational opportunities. Conference participants were not united and feared that organizers were attempting to split the Chicano movement along gender lines. The conference ended unsuccessfully when approximately half of the delegates walked out in protest of the focus on sexism over racism.

THOMAS EDMUND GREACEN II (1907-1994)

Thomas E. Greacen II was born on September 12, 1907, in Brooklyn, New York. After graduating from the Lawrenceville School in Princeton, New Jersey, he majored in architecture at Princeton University and did advanced studies at Columbia University and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts Americaines de Fontainebleau. Greacen's architectural career began in New York City where he worked briefly for the prestigious firms of York & Sawyer and Delano & Aldrich before starting his own practice there in 1932.

During World War II, Greacen served in the U.S. Army Air Forces in Washington, D.C, attaining the rank of lieutenant colonel. He designed military airfields throughout the United States and developed a "wind rose" for laying out runways to take advantage of prevailing winds. In 1944, Greacen and his wife Wynfred moved to Houston where he worked with architect Kenneth Franzheim, who had also been involved in wartime projects in Washington.

Greacen began his independent architectural practice in 1948. His designs include the Sugarland Shopping Center in Sugar Land (1952) for a subsidiary of the Imperial Sugar Company, the Elephant House at the Houston Zoo (1953), and First United Methodist Church in La Marque, Texas (1953). His best-known

independent work is First Unitarian/Universalist Church of Houston (1952), 5200 Fannin Street. The church won first prize in the Texas Society of Architects design competition the year it was completed.

Greacen and Raymond H. Brogniez were partners in the Houston firm of Greacen & Brogniez from 1953 to 1958. Together they designed two nationally recognized buildings: The Sylvan Beach Pavilion (1956) located in LaPorte, listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is a Recorded Texas Historic Landmark and a State Antiquities Landmark. The Gibraltar Savings Building (1957), located at 2302 Fannin Street, was the recipient of the Architectural Merit Award from Texas Architect magazine in 1959 and was also prominently featured in the August 1960 edition of Arts and Architecture magazine.

In 1961, Greacen independently designed the First Congregational Church of Houston (10840 Beinhorn), which he was a member.

The following years, Greacen & Richard Stanton Evans designed the M.D. Anderson-Magnolia Park YWCA. By 1968, their firm was known as Greacen, Evans & Rogers and specialized in designing public school buildings. At various times during his career, Greacen taught architecture at the University of Houston and Rice University. In 1975, he was made a Fellow of the American Institute of Architects in recognition of his lifelong contributions to his profession. Greacen retired from practice in 1987.

RICHARD STANTON EVANS (1905-1968)

Richard Stanton Evans was born in Birmingham, Alabama, on May 17, 1905. He graduated from Phillips High School in Birmingham in 1927 and attended the University of Alabama and Georgia Institute of Technology for a single year at each school.

In 1927, Evans began working as a draftsman for Denham, Van Keuren & Denham, Architects & Engineers, in his hometown; he eventually became the firm's chief draftsman. From 1943 to 1947, Evans worked as a draftsman for Chapman, Evans & Delehanty in New York City and as a draftsman for prominent San Antonio architect Ralph H. Cameron from 1947 to 1948.

In 1950, Evans joined Houston architects Claude R. Cato and Burton L. Austin in the firm Cato, Austin & Evans and represented Detroit architects Giffels & Vallet on their Houston projects. Works by Cato, Austin & Evans include the Benckenstein House (1953, altered) in Orange, Texas, which received an Award of Merit

from the Texas Society of Architects, and the University of Houston Engineering & Classroom Building (1955, demolished), which received an AIA Houston Medal of Honor.

Evans left Cato, Burton & Evans in 1955 and worked briefly for R.H. Brogniez & Associates and Lenard Gabert & Associates before joining Thomas E. Greacen's firm. He became a partner in Greacen & Evans in 1961 and a member of the American Institute of Architects in 1962. The firm was renamed Greacen, Evans & Rogers in 1968 when Bernard H. Rogers became a partner. Greacen, Evans & Rogers specialized in the design of public school buildings.

Richard Evans died in 1968 at the age of 62 after battling lung cancer. He is interred at Elmwood Cemetery in Birmingham, Alabama.

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND RESTORATION HISTORY:

The M.D. Anderson-Magnolia Park YWCA is a 28,000-square-foot, flat-roofed building constructed of hollow-core concrete block on a slab foundation. The front facade faces SSW on Navigation Boulevard. The building occupies the full depth of the property between Navigation and Avenue N and has a secondary façade on Avenue N. The facility contains three functional areas: classroom/office, auditorium/gallery and gymnasium. The functional areas are arranged around a central courtyard and are separated by breezeways. A parking lot runs through the east side of the property with entrances on Navigation and Avenue N.

The asymmetrical front façade contains three bays of varying width and height. The first (west) bay is one-and-one-half stories tall and contains the street façade of the auditorium/gallery space. The narrow,

one-story second (central) bay contains the main entrance to the building. The one-story third (east) bay is the widest of the three bays and contains the street façade of the classroom/office section of the building.

The body of the first bay is recessed from the main façade of the building and is composed of a plain concrete block wall topped with a narrow metal cap. Two square, symmetrically spaced plate glass windows are in the left (west) third of the bay. The windows are covered with metal grilles with bars in a vertical wave pattern.

A one-story section projects from the remaining two-thirds of the first bay. The decoration on the projecting section of the bay consists of repeating, horizontal rows of three squares each. The square elements are created with concrete blocks that slightly protrude from the wall surface. The projecting section of the bay is topped with boxed eaves. A wide metal fascia continues through the remaining two bays.

The narrow, one-story central bay contains the main entrance from the street. A concrete block wall projects from the main façade of the building. The entrance is marked by six metal gates with bars in a vertical wave pattern that matches the grilles on the windows in the first bay. The opening for the breezeway between the auditorium/gallery space and classroom office space is recessed under the continuing metal fascia. In 1990, the mural “Hispanic Culture” was painted on the north wall of the entry breezeway by artist Daniel Lechón (b. 1929), a protégé of the famed muralist Diego Rivera. The Houston-based Lechón was born in Puebla, Mexico, and is the subject of a PBS special, *Brushstrokes of South Texas: The Murals of Daniel Lechón*.

The third (east) bay is one story tall and is the widest of the three bays. A concrete block wall screens the full width of the third bay. The name “M.D. ANDERSON MAGNOLIA PARK YWCA” is in metal block letters on the upper north end of the wall. The wall has been painted with a mural containing a large central magnolia flower between the words “MAGNOLIA” and “PARK.” “Est. 1909” refers to the date Magnolia Park was founded, and the silhouette of a tree represents the hundreds of trees planted by the developers after the subdivision was platted. The mural was painted in 2017 by the Berlin-based artist Marin Majić (b. 1979) from a design by Magnolia Park resident Jesse Rodriguez.

The plate glass transoms on the façade of the classroom/office section of the building are visible above the wall. The windows are recessed under the eaves and the continuous metal fascia.

The rear façade faces Avenue N. The one-story left (east) bay contains the classroom/office areas of the building. It is set back from Avenue N behind a large grassy area. The façade of this bay contains five rectangular plate glass windows with metal frames under five plate glass transoms. The windows rest on a concrete block base with a continuous masonry sill. A pair of metal-framed plate glass doors under a plate glass transom are toward the right (north) end of the façade adjacent to the entry to the breezeway the separates the

classroom/office area from the gymnasium, which is set at a right angle to the classroom/office areas. This section of the building most reflects the influence of the International Style.

The Avenue N façade of the gymnasium contains a plain concrete block wall topped with a narrow metal cap. A one-story section containing the locker rooms projects from the left (east) side of the two-story

gymnasium. Metal downspouts are symmetrically spaced on the façade of the gym. The bottom quarter of the gymnasium's façade contains rows of vents created by turning the concrete blocks on their sides.

Renovations on the building started in 2014 by the current owner. The auditorium/gallery space and the office/classroom building renovations have been completed. The roof has been repaired and the exterior of the building has been painted.

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The information and sources provided by the applicant for this application have been reviewed, verified, edited and supplemented with additional research and sources by the Historic Preservation Office, Planning and Development Department, City of Houston.

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR LANDMARK DESIGNATION

Sec. 33-224. Criteria for designation

(a) The HAHC, in making recommendations with respect to designation, and the city council, in making a designation, shall consider one or more of the following criteria, as appropriate for the type of designation:

S	NA		S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(1) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area possesses character, interest or value as a visible reminder of the development, heritage, and cultural and ethnic diversity of the city, state, or nation;			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(2) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is the location of a significant local, state or national event;			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(3) Whether the building, structure, object, site or area is identified with a person who, or group or event that, contributed significantly to the cultural or historical development of the city, state, or nation;			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(4) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area exemplify a particular architectural style or building type important to the city;			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(5) Whether the building or structure or the buildings or structures within the area are the best remaining examples of an architectural style or building type in a neighborhood;			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(6) Whether the building, structure, object or site or the buildings, structures, objects or sites within the area are identified as the work of a person or group whose work has influenced the heritage of the city, state, or nation;			
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	(7) Whether specific evidence exists that unique archaeological resources are present;			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	(8) Whether the building, structure, object or site has value as a significant element of community sentiment or public pride.			

CITY OF HOUSTON

Archaeological & Historical Commission

Planning and Development Department

AND

- ☐ ☒ (9) If less than 50 years old, or proposed historic district containing a majority of buildings, structures, or objects that are less than 50 years old, whether the building, structure, object, site, or area is of extraordinary importance to the city, state or nation for reasons not based on age (Sec. 33-224(b)).

Sec. 33-229. Criteria for protected landmark designation

S	NA	S - satisfies	D - does not satisfy	NA - not applicable
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>			
(1) Meets at least three of the criteria for designation in section 33-224 of this Code;				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
(2) Was constructed more than 100 years before application for designation was received by the director;				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
(3) Is listed individually or as a contributing structure in an historic district on the National Register of Historic Places; or				
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>			
(4) Is recognized by the State of Texas as a Recorded State Historical Landmark.				

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommend to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the M.D. Anderson-Magnolia Park YWCA (former) at 7305 Navigation Blvd.

HAHC RECOMMENDATION

The Houston Archaeological and Historical Commission recommends to City Council the Protected Landmark Designation of the M.D. Anderson-Magnolia Park YWCA (former) at 7305 Navigation Blvd.

EXHIBIT A

PHOTOS

M.D. ANDERSON-MAGNOLIA PARK YWCA
7305 NAVIGATION BLVD.



EXHIBIT A

PHOTOS

M.D. ANDERSON-MAGNOLIA PARK YWCA
7305 NAVIGATION BLVD.

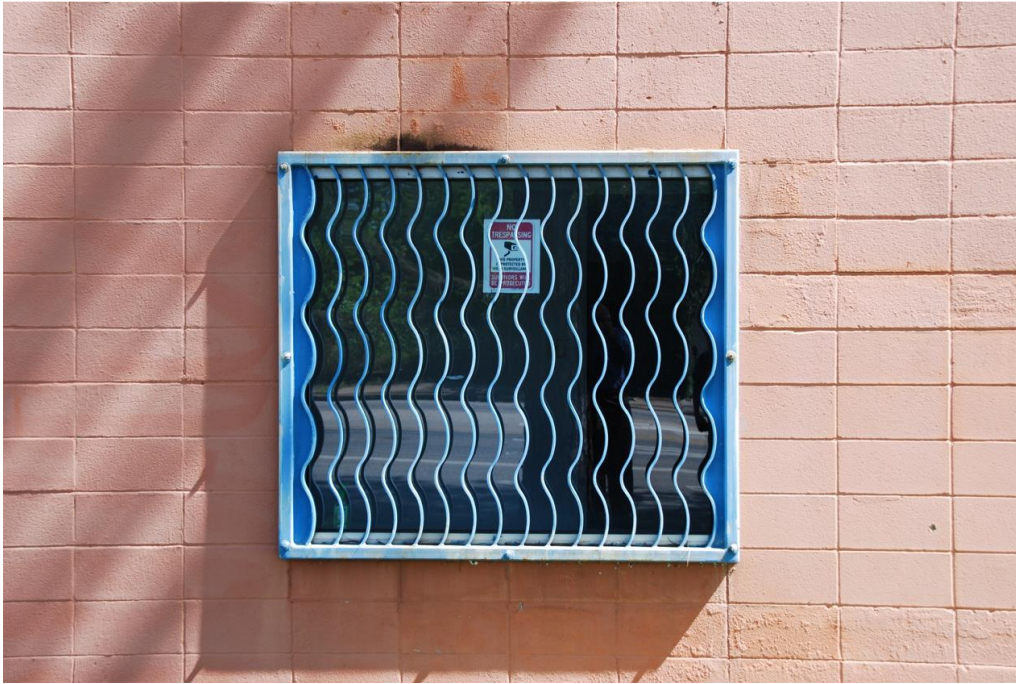


EXHIBIT A

PHOTOS

M.D. ANDERSON-MAGNOLIA PARK YWCA
7305 NAVIGATION BLVD.



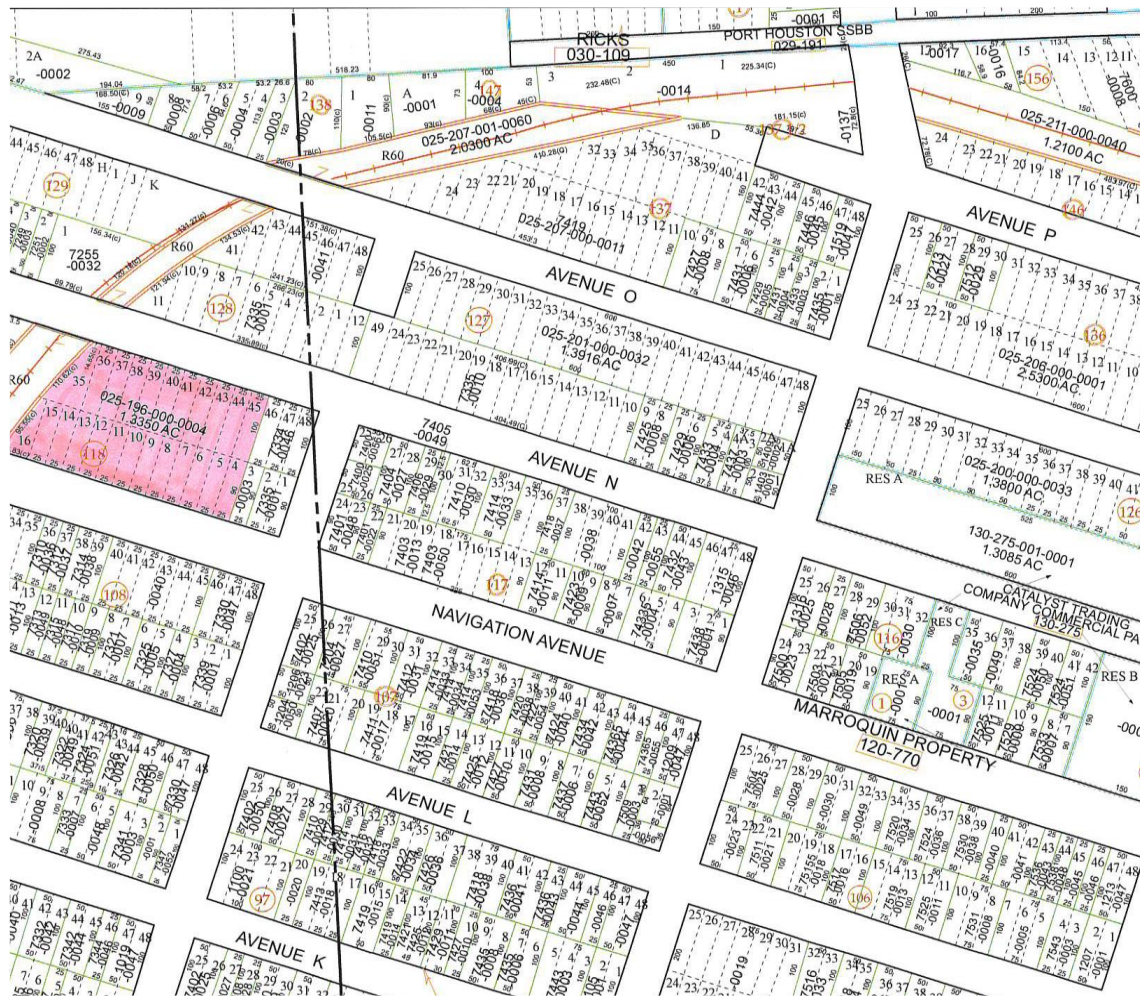
EXHIBIT A PHOTOS

M.D. ANDERSON-MAGNOLIA PARK YWCA
7305 NAVIGATION BLVD.



EXHIBIT B SITE MAP

M.D. ANDERSON-MAGNOLIA PARK YWCA
7305 NAVIGATION BLVD.



ⁱ Jute Mill – The mills processed a plant fiber called Jute, which made burlap materials.